

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----071442 151058Z /11

R 142150Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7895

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BRASILIA 4703

EXDIS

EO 11652 GDS
TAGS SHUM BR
SUBJECT: POSSIBLE USG ACTION IN SUPPORT OF BRAZILIAN HUMAN RIGHTS
COALITION

REF: STATE 146244

SUMMARY: THE BRAZILIAN POLITICAL SITUATION IS CURRENTLY VERY FLUID BUT GENERALLY MOVING IN DIRECTION CONSISTENT WITH US GOALS AND OBJECTIVES. WE BELIEVE THE BEST POSTURE FOR THE USG AT THIS TIME IS TO FOLLOW THE PRECEDENT SET BY PRESIDENT CARTER DURING HIS MARCH VISIT, I.E., THAT OF BEING AN INTERESTED OBSERVER WITH RESPECT FOR NON-INTERFERENCE IN BRAZIL'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. END SUMMARY.

1. AS EMBASSY REPORTING HAS INDICATED, THE PACE OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN BRAZIL HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY RAPID. IT RECEIVED STRONG IMPETUS FROM THE WIDESPREAD ADVERSE REACTION TO THE MANNER IN WHICH ARENA'S CANDIDATES FOR THE SEPTEMBER 1 INDIRECT GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS WERE DESIGNATED BY THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE IN APRIL. AS ALSO REPORTED, THE SITUATION DEVELOPED EVEN GREATER MOMENTUM FOLLOWING THE JUNE 4 DEFEAT IN THE SAO PAULO STATE CONVENTION OF THE GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATE THAT HAD BEEN HAND-PICKED BY GENERAL FIGUEIREDO. THE SAO PAULO DEFEAT AND THE GOVERNMENT'S AND FIGUEIREDO'S REACTION THERETO (ONE OF OSTENSIBLE ACCEPTANCE), OPENED A RANGE OF ELECTORAL POSSIBILITIES, PREVIOUSLY CONSIDERED FORECLOSED,
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FOR OTHER ARENA DISSIDENTS AND THE OPPOSITION MDB. IT ALSO PROVIDED ENCOURAGEMENT TO ONGOING EFFORTS TO GIVE ORGANIZATIONAL SUBSTANCE TO THE STILL EMBRYONIC "FRONT FOR REDEMOCRATIZATION", IN WHICH ITS PROMOTERS HOPE TO BRING TOGETHER THE VARIED CIVILIAN AND SO FAR SCATTERED MILITARY ELEMENTS SEEKING TO PRESSURE GEISEL INTO A BROADER AND MORE IMMEDIATE POLITICAL OPENING THAN HE MAN HAVE INTENDED.

2. THESE DEVELOPMENTS HAVE GENERATED A GREAT DEAL OF POLITICAL ACTIVITY WHICH HAS SO FAR BEEN MARKED BY CAUTION ON ALL SIDES. RESPONSIBLE SPOKESMEN FOR CIVILIAN GROUPS, PARTICULARLY INCLUDING THE MDB'S TOP LEADERSHIP, HAVE BEEN MOST CAREFUL IN THEIR RESPONSES TO THE SITUATION. THE GOVERNMENT, VIA SENATOR PORTELLA, THE PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SPOKESMAN AND OTHERS, HAS BEEN A MODEL OF MODERATION. TOP MILITARY FIGURES, INCLUDING "DISSIDENTS" LIKE GENERAL HUGO ABREU AND RETIRED GENERAL EULER BENTES, HAVE REMAINED CORRECT IN THEIR PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON HIGHLY CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES.

3. ALL PARTICIPANTS ARE ACTING OUT A DYNAMIC THAT IS ENTIRELY BRAZILIAN--THAT OF INTERACTION BETWEEN CIVILIAN AND MILITARY ELITES IN WHAT ARE BELIEVED TO BE THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE COUNTRY. THIS HAS BEEN TRADITIONAL IN BRAZIL THROUGHOUT ITS 156 YEARS OF INDEPENDENCE, AND PARTICULARLY SO DURING THIS CENTURY. IT WAS THIS SAME INTERACTION THAT RESULTED IN THE PEACEFUL OVERTHROW OF THE VARGAS DICTATORSHIP IN 1945, IN ASSURING THE PEACEFUL SUCCESSION TO THE PRESIDENCY OF JOAO GOULART IN 1961, AND IN HIS SUBSEQUENT PEACEFUL OVERTHROW IN 1964. IN THESE AND OTHER INSTANCES THE MILITARY

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USUALLY AFTER CONSIDERABLE CIVILIAN PERSUASION, BECAME ASSOCIATED WITH WIDESPREAD CIVILIAN SENTIMENT THAT HAD BEEN COALESCING OVER A PERIOD OF TIME. WITHOUT BEING OVERLY OPTIMISTIC, SOME VETERAN OBSERVERS OF THE LOCAL SCENE BELIEVE THAT SOMETHING SIMILAR IS OCCURRING NOW. THERE IS NO QUESTION IN MANY MINDS (INCLUDING OURS)
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,
THAT THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT AS A WHILE--PERHAPS WITH IMPORTANT EXCEPTIONS--IS WELL AWARE OF AND TO VARYING DEGREES SHARES WHAT IS TERMED THE GENERAL CIVILIAN "FATIGUE" WITH THE STATE OF AFFAIRS THAT HAS PREVAILED SINCE 1964. FURTHER, THE MILITARY THEMSELVES HAVE BECOME SURFEITED WITH THEIR UNPRECEDENTED AND ESSENTIALLY STILL UNFAMILIAR ROLE IN THE POLITICAL DIRECTION OF THE NATION. AGAIN WITH

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W

-----071590 151111Z /11

R 142150Z JUN 78

FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7896

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BRASILIA 4703

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SOME POSSIBLY IMPORTANT EXCEPTIONS, THEY ARE TIRED OF BEING IN POWER AND OF BEING BLAMED FOR WHATEVER GOES WRONG, ANXIOUS TO RETURN TO THEIR PROFESSIONAL PURSUITS AND TO THEIR TRADITIONAL ROLE AS MODERATORS

(I.E., MONITORS) OF THE POLITICAL PROCESS. HOWEVER, THEY ARE ALSO CONCERNED THAT THE PROCESS OF THEIR EXTRICATION NOT BE DISRUPTIVE OF THE POLITICAL STABILITY OR THE ECONOMIC PROGRESS THEY HAVE ACHIEVED. THIS CONCERN IS IN TURN SHARED BY THE BULK OF MODERATE CIVILIAN LEADERSHIP--AGAIN, INCLUDING THAT OF THE MDB.

4. WHAT SEEMS NOW UNDERWAY IS THE BEGINNING OF THE PROCESS OF EXTRICATION. NO ONE CAN YET KNOW WHETHER THE PROCESS IS IRREVERSIBLE. BUT THE IMPORTANT THING IS THAT IT HAS BEGUN, THAT IT IS MOST PROBABLY PROCEEDING AT A PACE SOMEWHAT FASTER THAN ANTICIPATED BY GEISEL, AND THAT IT HAS ENGAGED THE FULL ATTENTION OF THE ENTIRE NATION, INCLUDING THE MILITARY.

5. THE PROCESS IS A VERY DELICATE ONE. BOTH CIVILIANS AND MILITARY ARE FEELING THEIR WAY--TRYING NOT TO BE PROVOCATIVE ONE OF THE OTHER, NOT TO TAKE A FALSE STEP, NOT TO RESPOND IRRATIONALLY TO ACTIONS BY ONE OR THE OTHER; IN SUM, NOT TO CAUSE, UNWITTINGLY OR OTHERWISE, A RETROGRESSION. TOP SPOKESMEN FOR THE GOB (INCLUDING GEISEL AND FIGUEIREDO) AND THE OPPOSITON (INCLUDING MDB) HAVE PUBLICLY VOICED THIS LATTER CONCERN.

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6. IN LIGHT OF THE ABOVE, WE BELIEVE THAT OUR BEST POSTURE TOWARD BRAZIL'S POLITICAL EVOLUTION IS TO REMAIN INTERESTED AND, IF AND WHEN APPROACHED, COOPERATIVE OBSERVERS. THIS IS THE POSTURE THAT WON PRESIDENT CARTER SO MANY POINTS FROM ALL SIDES DURING HIS VISIT LAST MARCH--FOR CONDUCTING HIMSELF WITH DUE RESPECT FOR THE INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND SOVEREIGNTY OF BRAZIL. WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO CONDUCT OURSELVES IN THIS MANNER, AND ESPECIALLY IN THOSE AREAS IN WHICH CONFRONTATION OCCURRED LAST YEAR: NUCLEAR ENERGY AND HUMAN RIGHTS. THE JUST CONCLUDED AND VERY SUCCESSFUL VISIT OF AMBASSADOR GERARD SMITH IS AN EXCELLENT ILLUSTRATION. HIS CAREFUL REGARD FOR EXTREME BRAZILIAN SENSITIVITY ON THE NUCLEAR ISSUE PERMITTED HIS VISIT TO BE BOTH CONSTRUCTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE ON AN ISSUE AROUND WHICH ALL BRAZILIANS HAVE RALLIED WHEN BRAZIL'S

POSITION HAS APPEARED TO HAVE BEEN "CHALLENGED" BY THE UNITED STATES. ON HUMAN RIGHTS, THE MDB AND OTHER CIVILIAN GROUPS HAVE BEEN APPRECIATIVE OF THE OVERARCHING SUPPORT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS CAUSES IN BRAZIL THAT HAS BEEN PROVIDED BY THE NOW PERVASIVE AWARENESS THROUGHOUT BRAZILIAN SOCIETY OF OUR GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY (EVIDENCED, FOR EXAMPLE, BY THE MDB'S STRONG WORDS OF PRAISE FOR THIS POLICY DURING THE JOINT SESSION OF CONGRESS IN HONOR OF PRESIDENT CARTER), BUT THEY HAVE NEITHER ASKED FOR OUR DIRECT SUPPORT OF BRAZILIAN INITIATIVES NOR INDICATED INTEREST IN SEEKING TO INVOLVE US IN THE VERY BRAZILIAN PROCESS NOW UNDERWAY. THE MDB WAS VERY AWAREFUL, FOR INSTANCE, TO AVOID ANY APPEARANCE OF SOLICITING A MEETING WITH PRESIDENT CARTER OUT OF CONCERN THAT IT BE INTERPRETED AS SEEKING HIS DIRECT SUPPORT FOR THE SOLUTION OF INTERNAL BRAZILIAN PROBLEMS. EFFORTS BY BRAZILIAN STUDENTS TO ELICIT US SUPPORT FOR THEIR CAUSE WERE SHARPLY AND PUBLICLY ATTACKED ON JUST THESE GROUNDS, AND THE STRONGEST CRITICS WERE OTHER STUDENTS.

7. THE SHORT ANSWER TO REFTEL IS, THEN, THAT WE DO NOT BELIEVE WE SHOULD BE TAKING ADDITIONAL STEPS TO SEEK TO ACCELERATE A PROCESS
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IN WHICH EVEN THOSE DIRECTLY INVOLVED HAVE RELATIVELY LITTLE EXPERIENCE AND ARE FEELING THEIR WAY. WITH REGARD TO ONE VETERAN OBSERVER'S RECOMMENDATION AS TO A DESIRABLE US POSTURE, SEE BRZILIA 4622, WHICH REPORTS A RECENT DISCUSSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS BETWEEN THE AMBASSADOR AND THE PAPAL NUNCIO.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLICIES, HUMAN RIGHTS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 jun 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BRASIL04703
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780250-0151
Format: TEL
From: BRASILIA
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780662/aaaacbks.tel
Line Count: 202
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 47abbc89-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 78 STATE 146244
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 08 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 2364281
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: POSSIBLE USG ACTION IN SUPPORT OF BRAZILIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COALITION
TAGS: SHUM, BR, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/47abbc89-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014